

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
7 August 1966

4 State Dept. review completed

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HIGHLIGHTS

A major multibattalion allied operation was launched this weekend against an estimated ten-battalion Communist force reported to be located northwest of Chu Lai in Quang Nam and Quang Tin provinces. In North Vietnam, four DRV PT boats were sunk by US Navy aircraft.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Ten allied battalions initiate search-and-destroy Operation COLORADO/LIEN KET 52 in Quang Nam and Quang Tin provinces (Para. 1). Operation EL PASO III is resumed in Binh Long Province by four battalions of the US 25th Infantry Division (Para. 2). Operations CHEYENNE and KOKO HEAD terminated yesterday (Paras. 3-4). Viet Cong allegedly have recruiting problems in the delta (Para. 5).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Recent efforts by the Japanese ambassador to Saigon have increased the possibility of a visit to Japan by Buddhist militant Tri Quang (Paras. 1-3). The antigovernment Citizens' Front of Catholic leader Hoang Quynh is reportedly backing Buddhist calls for the release of political prisoners (Para. 4). [redacted] extensive apathy and cynicism in the delta provinces toward the September constituent assembly elections (Para. 5). The country's new civilian-military advisory group may recommend economic measures, relaxation of press censorship, and measures to improve the situation in I Corps when it meets this week (Para. 6). Premier Ky has told Ambassador Lodge that he will not discuss the subject of invading North Vietnam when he visits the Philippines from 10-13 August (Para. 7).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: Eight US aircraft were lost over North Vietnam during the weekend (Paras. 1-3). US Navy aircraft destroyed four North Vietnamese PT boats (Paras. 4-6)

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

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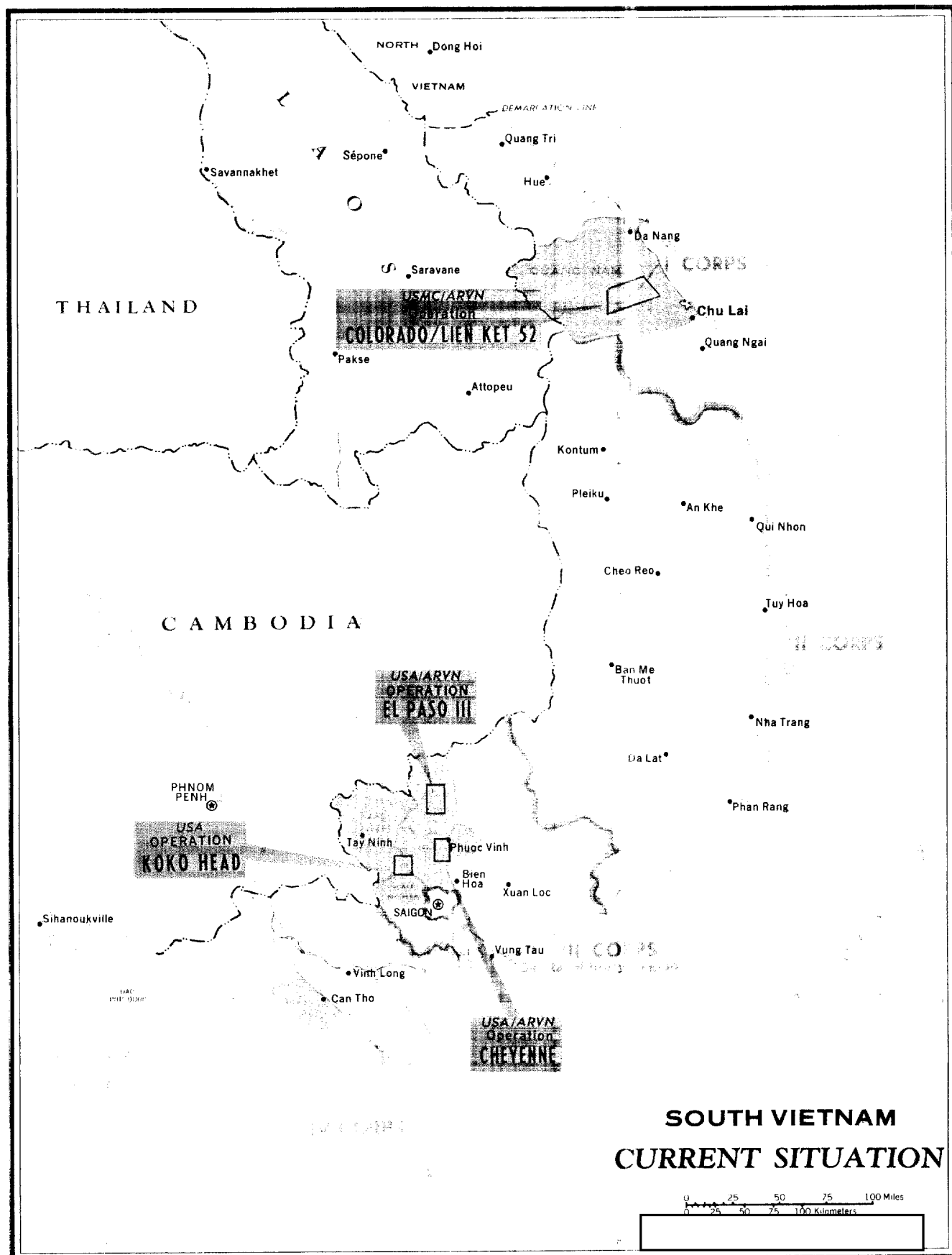
VI. Other Major Aspects:

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The Communists have improved their capability to move moderate amounts of supplies south into the Laotian panhandle in spite of worsening weather and continued US interdiction efforts (Paras. 4-6).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Three battalions of US Marines, combined with seven battalions of South Vietnamese troops, began joint search-and-destroy Operation COLORADO/LIEN KET 52 on 6 August. This operation is designed to locate and destroy an estimated ten-battalion Communist force of some 3,300 men reported to be in the area about 35 miles northwest of Chu Lai in Quang Nam and Quang Tin provinces. A South Vietnamese Marine unit encountered an estimated battalion-size enemy force yesterday after being helilifted into a Viet Cong - controlled valley. In the ensuing two-hour battle, 73 Viet Cong were killed and 27 captured. A total of three South Vietnamese Marines were killed and 48 wounded.

2. Operation EL PASO III, which was suspended on 1 August to provide support for Operation CHEYENNE, was resumed yesterday. Four battalions of the US 25th Infantry Division and three South Vietnamese Army battalions are participating in this search-and-destroy operation in Binh Long Province.

3. Operation CHEYENNE, a road security operation conducted by elements of the US 1st Infantry Division along Route 13 in Binh Duong Province north of Saigon, ended on 5 August. During the operation, 311 trucks--one of the largest military convoys of the war--were able successfully to travel the route which is a favorite ambush site of the Viet Cong. One American was killed and 14 wounded in the four-day operation. No Communist bodies were found; however, 17 were captured.

4. Operation KOKO HEAD, a search-and-destroy operation conducted by three battalions of the US 25th Infantry Division in an area about 20 miles northwest of Saigon, ended yesterday. This operation which began on 22 July resulted in Viet Cong losses of 42 killed, 25 captured, and 24 weapons captured. A total of eight Americans were killed and 14 wounded.

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Decline in Success of Viet Cong Recruiting

5. Information from a recently captured Viet Cong document reveals a decline in successful Viet Cong recruiting in the delta province of Phong Dinh. According to the document, 4,035 main and local force recruits were signed up during 1965, representing a drop of 16 percent from the number of Viet Cong recruits in this area in 1964. The number of guerrilla recruits also declined by approximately ten percent.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Further steps have been taken to try to arrange a visit by Buddhist extremist Tri Quang to Japan, although Quang's departure is still far from assured. Japan's ambassador to Saigon informed Ambassador Lodge that he has discussed the issue with both Foreign Minister Do and Bui Diem, a top adviser to Premier Ky, and has ascertained that the Saigon government would pose no obstacles to Quang's visit if an expected invitation from Japanese Buddhists is extended. Ky told Lodge on 5 August he was uncertain how to handle Tri Quang, but feared the latter would start new trouble if released from the Saigon clinic where he is detained. Ky indicated that a visit by Quang to Japan might offer a "good solution."

2. On 6 August, the Japanese ambassador told Lodge that Tri Quang had now decided to accept an invitation to Japan provided the Buddhist Institute leadership, apparently meeting that day, concurred. Quang, however, reportedly expressed uneasiness that he might never be allowed to return to South Vietnam if he left the country.

3. Various Buddhist statements during the weekend have suggested that Quang remains in a quandary over how to end his eight-week-old hunger strike. A Buddhist monk close to him expressed the view that Quang would not voluntarily end his fast or travel abroad while some of his followers remained imprisoned, but that he would probably end his hunger strike if so ordered by the country's aged, ranking bonze. A Buddhist Institute official on 5 August quoted Quang as pledging to continue his fast until the US withdrew support for the Ky regime. According to weekend press reports, the Institute has appealed to the UN, to Buddhist international headquarters, and to the Saigon diplomatic community to intervene for the release of "thousands" of its followers under detention.

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4. The small, antigovernment Citizens' Front of All Religions, led by Catholic priest Hoang Quynh, is apparently backing recent Buddhist challenges to the government to either free or convict political detainees, including Tri Quang. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the Citizens' Front met late last week with Buddhist Institute leaders and the heads of at least one participating Cao Dai religious faction. Those present agreed to demand that all persons arrested by the Ky government during this spring's "struggle movement," as well as those still held for opposing the Khanh and Huong governments, be freed or brought to trial. Although no reference was made to detained supporters of former president Diem, it is possible that Father Quynh hopes such demands will prod the Ky government into action on the cases of many Catholics imprisoned without trial since Diem's overthrow. [REDACTED]

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Election Developments

5. The prevailing attitude in the Mekong Delta provinces toward the approaching constituent assembly election in September is one of apathy coupled with cynicism that the government will dictate the outcome. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] both the Hoa Hao religious sect and the small southern faction of the VNQDD (Nationalist Party) are tacitly boycotting the election although not prohibiting their members from filing candidacies on an individual basis. Similar apathy in Saigon has been alleged by certain politicians, but some nevertheless predict a fairly substantial vote, with interest rising as the campaign officially opens late this month. Voter registration currently totals almost five million, according to government figures.

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6. South Vietnam's newly formed civilian-military advisory body, the People's Army Council (PAC), is to convene in its second formal session from 8-13

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August. [redacted] the session will discuss and make recommendations on the economic situation, on relaxing press censorship, and on steps which may help restore the government's image in recently troubled I Corps.

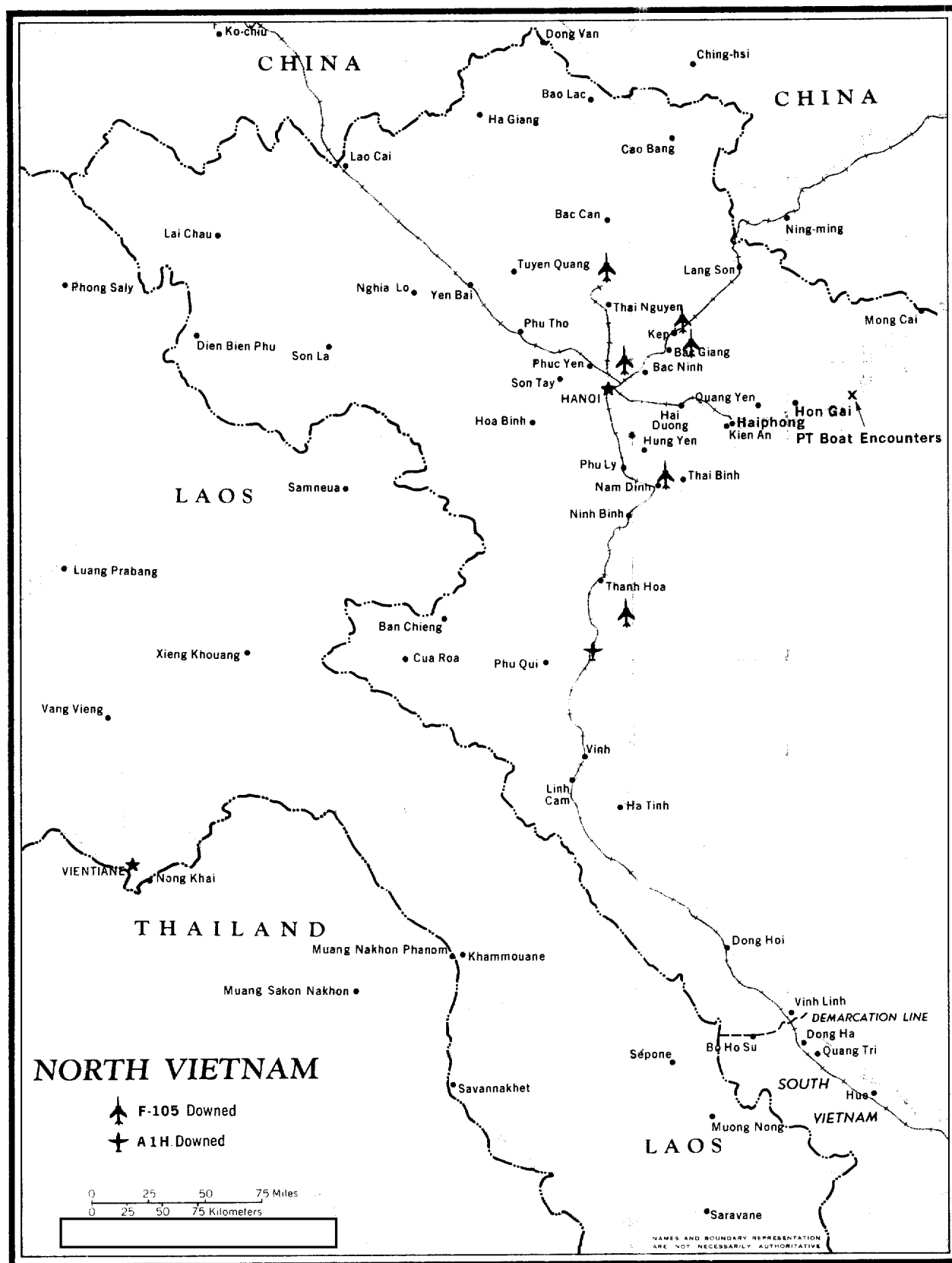
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Premier Ky Comments on Philippines Visit

7. Premier Ky has told Ambassador Lodge that he plans no official statements while in the Philippines this week concerning possible invasion of North Vietnam, although his speech will discuss "the nature of revolutionary war." Earlier, Vietnamese officials had reported that Ky's speech would include a "cautious retreat" from his recent remarks on the need to invade the North. Ky is scheduled to be in Manila from 10-13 August with his official party including armed forces chief General Vien, political and foreign affairs adviser Bui Diem, and economic adviser Truong Thai Ton.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Eight US aircraft were reported downed or missing over North Vietnam during the weekend.

2. Five US Air Force F-105 Thunderchief aircraft were downed on 7 August within a 60-mile radius of Hanoi--four by ground fire and one by a surface-fired missile. Only two of the seven crewmembers were rescued.

3. A US Navy A1H Skyraider aircraft was shot down by ground fire in an area about 35 miles southeast of Thanh Hoa and the pilot was reported killed. A seventh aircraft, a RF-101 Voodoo on a photoreconnaissance mission north of Hanoi, was reported missing and presumed downed.

4. On 6 August, a US Air Force F-105 Thunderchief was hit by 37-mm. ground fire while on an armed reconnaissance mission. The pilot ejected over the Gulf of Tonkin and was rescued.

US Aircraft Destroy Four PT Boats

5. Two US Navy A4 Skyhawks on a coastal armed reconnaissance mission located three well-camouflaged PT boats moored on an island about 55 miles northeast of Haiphong on 6 August. The boats opened fire with 37-mm. guns and the US aircraft attacked with rockets and 20-mm. fire for ten minutes then returned to their carrier because of low fuel. A follow-up mission against these three craft resulted in one boat sunk, one on fire and sinking, and the third damaged.

6. Later in the day, six US Navy A4 Skyraider aircraft located two more PT boats in the same general area. Both of these were destroyed by rocket fire and bombing attacks. No US aircraft were lost on either attack.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

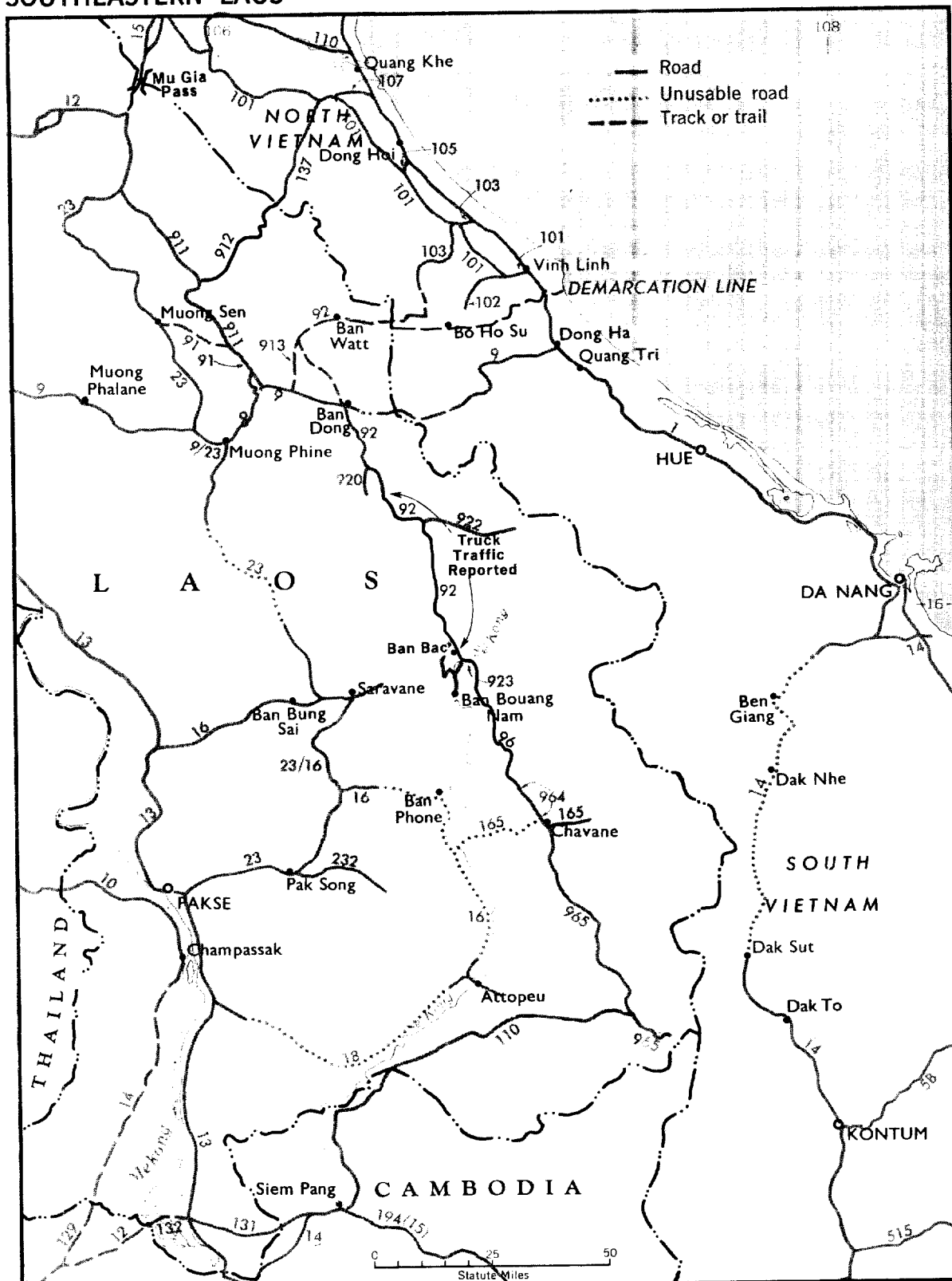
3. Moscow has not yet commented on this incident although it did protest a similar occurrence on 2 August. That protest, delivered to the US on 5 August, alleged that strafing by US aircraft had caused damage to the Soviet merchant ship Medyn while in Haiphong harbor. The protest was carefully worded, however, not to suggest that the ship was deliberately attacked, and the note itself did not appear to signal a change in Moscow's present policy of limiting Soviet risks in Vietnam. It did, however, reflect mounting Soviet apprehension over the course of the war as the danger to its merchantmen increases.

4. The Soviet note charged that US aircraft "strafed the mooring of Haiphong port" on 2 August and "in this connection, large caliber bullets" hit the Soviet vessel in question. Although the Soviet ship was in the Haiphong port area during a US strike, the aircraft are not reported to have expended ordnance which would fit the description of "large caliber bullets." Pilots did, however, report intense flak in the area and it is possible that the vessel was struck by material of that nature.

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SOUTHEASTERN LAOS



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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

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Laotian Road Traffic

4. The Communists have improved their capability to move moderate amounts of supplies south into the Laotian panhandle in spite of worsening weather and continued US interdiction efforts. Photography [redacted] revealed that a vehicular cable bridge has been constructed across the Ta Le river on Laotian Route 912 and that all interdictions on that route from the North Vietnamese border to the intersection with 911 have been bypassed. Additional aerial photography showed a convoy of 13 trucks on the same route [redacted]--the first convoy of that size noted on the route since the rainy season began. Earlier photography had shown military construction and corduroying along the approximate 30 miles of 912.

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5. Additionally, trucking in support of the Vietnamese war continues at a significant rate in other areas of Laos. Farther south on Route 92 in Saravane Province, ground observers reported at least 59 trucks moving toward South Vietnam between 25 and 31 July.

6. The apparent attendant low level of activity in the Mu Gia Pass area--Routes 12 and 23--indicates that the improved Route 912 is now the main infiltration route from North Vietnam into Laos. In contrast to the condition of 912, however, portions of the infiltration network, notably Route 96 south of Ban Bac, appear to be closed to vehicular traffic.

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